

The Locust Cycle

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who arrived in Kuwait on 27th February reported that he had seen ^K731 further large flights in South Hasa and Qatif at the end of January and early in February, also that Hufuf had had a bad visitation in January.

"It was thus anticipated that March would see another invasion of Kuwait.

"Very fortunately except for the swarm mentioned above no locusts actually reached Iraq or Kuwait and the previous years' invasions were not repeated."

"On 23rd May Professor B. P. Uvarov of the South Kensington Natural History Museum, visited Kuwait to collect data regarding the previous three years' visitations, and the lines of approach of the various swarms up from S.W. Arabia to Najd and Kuwait. He prophesied that Kuwait would see no more locusts in 1932 or for another three or four years, as all evidence went to prove that they appeared in cycles of three years at a time. His prophecy came remarkably true, and between 1932 and 1935 there have been no locust visitations at all. Let us hope that 1936* will not see a reappearance."

So much for my own experience, and the damage done to town dwellers, and owners of gardens and sheep.

The Badawin proper, that is to say the great migrating camel ^B825 tribes, do not mind the locusts much, in fact they rejoice in a way when they see them, for they indicate that the year is going to be a good one. Locusts, they say, only come in prosperous years.

It does not worry these nomads if large tracts of country are ^B731 denuded of fodder; they simply move off to country which has not ²⁶¹ been visited. They know that the damage done by locust swarms is ²⁶¹ more or less local, and that the insect will move to more favourable country lying to the north (Iraq) and will not bother them for long. They also enjoy the wonderful opportunity to satisfy for once in a while their ever-prevailing hunger. Nor is this all, for their horses, camels and dogs all get their fill, as well as foxes, bustard, monitor lizards, kites, shrikes and a dozen other denizens of the desert.

I remember once, when coming home with my wife from the Batin by car, meeting a swarm of locusts flying very low, moving across the plain west of Jahrah. It was near sunset, and we saw several

* They did not appear in 1936 or 1937.

Locust-feast

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731 full-sized *dhubs* and *wurral* monitors on the side of the track chasing
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much interested at the sight that we stopped our car and watched for
some five minutes. There were eight large monitors, and in their
excitement they appeared oblivious of our presence.

On another occasion I remember visiting a Badawin camp which
had just received a visitation of Carmine or Red Locusts. The whole
camp had turned out to slay and collect the insects for food, and from
the numbers collected it was evident that they had had a most success-
ful day. The roofs of all the black tents were strewn from end to
end with dead locusts spread out to dry, every available mat, rug and
lahdf was also laid out to take the excess catch, and camels, dogs,
mares and human beings were hard at work eating the insects,
whilst cooking pots, bags, paniers and water-skins were crammed to
overflowing with dried ones.

I, personally, never could fancy locusts much, but my wife and
daughter, especially the daughter, revelled in them. I am told that
even the Badawin enjoy them for a few days only, after which their
gorge seems to rise against the food, and they give the remnants of
their catch to their animals.

THE BADU OF SOUTHERN ARABIA

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drought-resisting trees and shrubs, which will at any rate keep them alive. Under such circumstances the milk supply gets very short and the Arabs suffer much from hunger, for milk is their staple food. Among the Badu in South-Western Arabia dates are a rare luxury, meat is seldom eaten except by guests for whom an animal has been slaughtered, and all grain has to be purchased in the villages. 233
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You can see that it is a hard life with absolutely no margin. Hunger and thirst, heat and cold—bitter cold. Few people realize how cold it can be in these Arabian deserts. In summer the temperature rises to 120° in the shade, and there really is no shade, and the only water which these Badu have to drink is brackish and tastes like a strong dose of Epsom salts. In winter it is nearly freezing, and at night a herdsboy will scrape a shallow trench in the sand, lie down naked in it and then cover himself with his shirt. It certainly is a desperately hard life, and it is made even harder by continuous raiding and counter-raiding. Everyone is living the whole time in a state of suspense with his rifle in his hand and his eyes scanning the horizon. A herdsman sees some mounted Arabs in the distance and immediately collects his camels, which are never very numerous, and drives them off as fast as he can, for no one can afford to take any chances. If the people he has seen are friends they will signal by throwing up sand into the air or send one person forward alone waving his headcloth. Then, having established contact, they will ride over, ask the news—for Badu are always anxious to have the latest news—and let their mounts graze while they refresh themselves with the milk which the herdsman provides. Generally, to keep their herds alive at all on the scanty grazing, the Badu must scatter widely, and can put up no resistance against a raiding party which may be as many as two hundred strong. All they can do is to try to drive off their camels at the first hint of danger and, if they are robbed but themselves escape, collect their friends and set off in pursuit. The raiders consequently work fast, gather what spoil they can, and disappear. Sometimes, especially if the raid has failed and if they are pursued, they have a desperate time getting back, and, should there be a blood feud between the two tribes, they can expect no mercy if they are overtaken. I heard of one party of raiders who had raided four hundred miles, had failed to get any loot, and who, to keep themselves alive on their way back, had cut off and eaten the tails and ears of their camels. Sometimes a pursuit party from the steppes follows the raiders far into sands which are unknown to them. Should a strong wind get up and blow out the tracks, they may be lost, unable to follow the raiders to the wells which lie ahead, and unable to retrace their own tracks home. Yet ordinarily the Badu are not afraid of thirst. More than once they have told me that in winter it would be hunger, not thirst, which would kill them if they were left without food or water. This is an instance of Badu exaggeration, but I have met Arabs who have lasted as long as seven days without either food or water. 132
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Many of them are wonderful trackers, for their very lives depend upon the accuracy with which they can read such signs. I remember once when I was riding across the desert with some of them how we came upon some half-obliterated marks in the sand. One of our party turned aside and 151
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